The Limits of Jointness

By SETH CROPSEY

Cooperation like apple pie is rarely if ever questioned as a desirable thing. Unfortunately, while everyone knows what an apple pie is, fixing a military definition of cooperation is much harder. The easy response is *jointness*, but trying to define this quality produces surprisingly varied answers. By implication, legislation already written defines jointness as a diminution of the power of the individual services. In a more positive vein the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Powell, sees jointness as teamwork and cooperation. Congressional ideas as expressed by the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Senator Nunn, find jointness in the elimination of redundant weapon systems or overlapping roles and missions. And history, both ancient and modern, testifies of a nearly universal agreement that true jointness demands seamlessly linked operations between different military capabilities.

If politicians and senior officers did not use the motley definitions in this strange pail to support different policies, the task of defining jointness could safely be left to theoreticians. Since, however, jointness has attained in the defense arena the buzzword status that *justice*, *equality*, and of late *empowerment* enjoy in the domestic debate, it is important to be as clear as possible about what jointness is and what it is not. Failure to do so is likely to lead to an erosion of the distinctive abilities of the military disciplines from whose differences—ironically—the rationale for jointness originally springs.

The difficulty of defining jointness was apparent in the debate over the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Both opponents and supporters of the legislation appealed to this elusive term to justify their arguments. The former claimed that because of the increased powers granted to the Chairman, future Presidents would lose the joint perspective provided by the expertise of other service chiefs. The legislation's proponents responded that an increase in the Chairman's power was needed to provide the jointness that was

Summary

Jointness defies consistent definition. The Goldwater-Nichols Act, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Senate Armed Services Committee, and students of operational art all view jointness differently. What will be the result of divergent, often opposing concepts of jointness? Goldwater-Nichols mandated jointness by structural reforms; General Powell sees jointness as interservice teamwork; Senator Nunn hopes jointness will be a mechanism for eliminating what he considers to be redundant roles and missions. History has shown that unified forces triumph while poorly organized ones perish. Nevertheless, General Schwarzkopf—who is lionized as an operational commander—waged joint warfare with great success, though he served in few joint assignments during his career. The summons to the services to fight as a team will be ignored by commanders at their own peril, and a joint culture may ensure that as the defense budget is slashed the services are diminished proportionately. But jointness must not eliminate the debate on the purposes and utility of the individual services that must now be conducted in the post-containment era.

missing due to the disproportionate influence of the individual services and their chiefs.

Change the Organization

Goldwater-Nichols does contain a definition of jointness, if only by negation. The legislation suggests what jointness does not mean by identifying interservice rivalry as the obstacle to it. Accordingly, the act aims at reducing the power of the services by changing military education to emphasize interservice cooperation, diminishing the control exercised by each service over careers, and increasing exposure of officers to a central staff. The 1986 landmark legislation never offered a positive model of how a more joint military would think or perform. But it did draft very firm guidelines altering service college curricula, insisted on specified qualifications for career advancement, and laid the foundation for shifting effective responsibility for acquisition of major weapons systems to the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

So comprehensive was the congressional understanding of jointness that the reorganization directly touched military officers *and* senior civilian officials. The legislation drained power from the service secretaries and gave new, broad authority to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), specifically, the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition. Consistent with the 30-year effort to gather authority within OSD—which does not embrace the private sector's current efforts to decentralize—the legislation's authors doubted the ability of the services to manage major programs and preferred instead to consolidate control over a $300 billion budget at the center.

Goldwater-Nichols applied the same approach to the military chain of command. Congress regarded the services as quarrelsome siblings with single, infinite appetites. It despaired at arbitrating endless contradictory claims, and sought to raise the Chairman and the Joint Staff so that they could settle disputes and unite the efforts of the unruly services. So successful was the legislation that General Powell, the first Chairman to serve his entire tour under the new law, has been able to give jointness a new meaning.

Powell has defined jointness in more positive terms than the 1986 legislation. His view is that cooperation means teamwork. Given the increasingly dismal prospects for defense funding and demands on the Armed Forces in a disorderly world, his definition also makes political sense.

In the private sector scarcity encourages thrift, drives prices up, and then usually seeks out other avenues to satisfy demand. In the Government—especially the military—dwindling budgets have traditionally stimulated a free-for-all between and among the services that rewards the bureaucratically adept and ends only when resources once again start to flow. The bitter fight over roles and missions following World War II is the most notorious example in American military history. Demobilization and postwar budget reductions were the dry tinder; President Truman's decision to pick that moment to fundamentally rearrange the services was the flame that set the pile burning.

Colin Powell has turned out to be more skillful at politics than Harry Truman. Contemplating the defense cuts at the beginning of his tenure in 1989, Powell has consistently sought to create an atmosphere of cooperation among the services that fends off divisive issues of basic structural change or reordering priorities. A measure of the stature that the Chairman's political skills have earned is a willingness to disagree with both Senator Nunn and President Clinton.

Senator Nunn asked basic questions in July 1992 about the structure of the Armed Forces, such as whether naval aviation and the Marine Corps were still required. He wondered if a single service should be placed in charge of all electronic warfare aircraft, and whether the responsibility for defending troops and installations should be consolidated under the Air Force. Echoing these difficult queries, but taking them a major step

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toward execution, President Clinton in August 1992 told the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles that:

In 1948, then Secretary of Defense James Forrestal convened a meeting of the military service chiefs in Key West to allocate responsibilities among the four services. It failed. As President, I will order the Pentagon to convene a similar meeting to hammer out a new understanding about consolidating and coordinating military missions in the 1990s and beyond.

In a draft assessment of the future of the Armed Forces, noted in the press on the last day of 1992, Powell saw no reason for sweeping changes. "Yes, we can be said to have four air forces," said the Chairman's report, "but each is different, playing a unique and complementary role."

Change the Spirit

The image of the military as a powerful organism composed of mutually dependent and cooperative groupings of cell structures has characterized General Powell's tenure as Chairman. *Joint Warfare of the U.S. Armed Forces* (Joint Pub 1), which was published in November 1991, is the clearest picture of this image. Technology, it says, has made the services increasingly interdependent. Teamwork, trust, and cooperation among the services are needed now more than ever to succeed in war. And as balance is required in the kinds of forces fielded, "there is no place for rivalry" among members of the joint team.

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The idea of jointness in Joint Pub 1 is politically attractive because it helps suppress dissension among the services at a time when straitened budgets are most likely to cause such quarrels. Moreover, the need for teamwork between the different military disciplines rests on unassailable operational ground. Joint Pub 1 singles out examples in American history from riverine warfare along the Mississippi in the Civil War to Douglas MacArthur's amphibious attack on the enemy's rear at Inchon in 1950. But the writers could have reached much further back into history.

In 425 B.C., the seventh year of their famous contest, the Athenians and Spartans fought over the protected harbor of Pylos on the west coast of the Peloponnesian peninsula. The Athenian command concentrated its efforts on the Spartan garrison which held out on Sphacteria, the island that guards the western approaches to Pylos. Throughout an operation that lasted over ten weeks the Athenian navy worked smoothly with heavy and light infantry, the former enforcing a blockade that hampered resupply of the Spartan detachment, the latter frontally harassing the besieged defenders. Eventually hunger helped break the Spartans' will to resist and allowed the Athenians to surprise their enemy in his fortified positions.

Two centuries later, the struggle between Rome and Carthage for power in the Mediterranean spilled over into Spain. As Scipio, the joint commander, directed a bombardment and infantry assault against the walled city of New Carthage (today's Cartagena), his naval component commander Admiral Caius Laelius launched a simultaneous amphibious attack on the city's seaward side. Diverted by these synchronized shocks, the defenders neglected their third flank which lay exposed to a shallow lake through which a Roman detachment waded and entered New Carthage. After defeating the besieged Carthaginians, Scipio offered a crown to the man who had first breached the walls. When both a marine and a centurion of the fourth legion claimed the honor, Scipio acted with great respect for what we would today call jointness. He awarded two prizes and declared that both warriors had mounted the wall at the same moment.

The need for combined operations and harmony between the different fighting disciplines has been understood—if not always practiced—since antiquity. But Joint Pub 1 takes this proven operational idea another step by arguing that the teamwork needed in battle is just as necessary throughout the military's other work, using the same language of exhortation to encourage equal harmony throughout the whole military.

DOD photo

Senator Nunn during a visit to the Persian Gulf.

Because "the arena of our potential operations is the entire planet," the Armed Forces require "the ability to project and sustain *the entire range* (emphasis added) of military power over vast distances." [1] There is "no place for rivalry that seeks to undercut or denigrate fellow members of the joint team." [2] And, "the nature of modern warfare puts a premium on cooperation with each other to compete with the enemy." [3]

For actual combat, Joint Pub 1's call to pull together is clear and cannot be disputed. However, in drawing up a concept of operations to prepare for combat or in drafting the doctrine that determines what forces will be called upon, or in choosing which weapons to build or what national military strategy to follow, the admonition to cooperate runs into problems. Reasonable men can—and do—differ about weapons systems, the appropriateness of certain missions, and the contributions of the individual services to the Nation's security.

According to Joint Pub 1, "Individual professional growth, reinforced by military education and varied service and joint assignments, leads to a refined capability to command joint forces in peace and war." [4] But the document does not claim that this combination of education and experience will answer thorny military questions, the ones that predictably draw bureaucratic blood and leave trails of nettles from the Pentagon to Capitol Hill. What does Joint Pub 1 expect when such issues arise? Should officers use teamwork and cooperation as a guide, adjusting their opinions to avoid clashes with other experts from different services?

This question is particularly relevant to still another current definition of jointness, the one noted above that has been proposed by Senator Nunn and endorsed by President Clinton. In their view the Key West agreements on service roles and missions that Secretary of Defense Forrestal and the chiefs reached in March 1948 have failed to prevent wasteful duplications of effort. As candidate Clinton said in his Los Angeles World Affairs Council speech:

> *I agree with Senator Sam Nunn that it is time to take a fresh look at the basic organization of our Armed Forces. We have four separate air forces—one each for the Marines, Army, Navy, and Air Force. Both the Army and Marines have light infantry divisions. The Navy and Air Force have separately developed, but similar, fighter aircraft and tactical missiles . . . . While respecting each service's unique capabilities, we can reduce redundancies, save billions of dollars, and get better teamwork.*

Change the Missions

Far more radical than either Goldwater-Nichols or the Chairman's calls to join hands in battle and out, the Clinton-Nunn vision sees teamwork as the by-product of efficiency. Rationalizing the missions of the Armed Forces so that no two services perform the same job will save money first and demand cooperation second. Of the several approaches toward establishing a more unified military, the ideas supporting this one are weakest. Not because Nunn's proposal to combine such staff functions as the medical, chaplain, and legal corps are baseless. And not because his questions about the need for separate air and infantry capabilities in his Senate speech of July 2, 1992 are unworthy.

Nunn's argument fails to observe its own standards. Quoting a former Chairman, Admiral William Crowe, Nunn rightly faults the customary manner in which America has reduced its forces at "the end of a period of military crisis and the start of an era of relative peace." Proceeding backwards, the United States has cut defense first, says Senator Nunn,

and asked second how "to shape a new force in light of the changed circumstances."

However, instead of trying to peer into the years ahead or explain the lessons that should have been learned from the struggle against the Soviets, Nunn looks to the past. For him, the most important challenge in America's change of circumstances is "to provide a fighting force . . . that is not bound by the constraints of the roles and missions outlined in 1948."

Nunn, of course, is referring to the compromise by which the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs were established while maintaining a separate Marine Corps and naval aviation arm. This compromise was a political response to an idea developed by Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall. Deputy Chief of Staff General Joseph McNarney presented the proposal to the House Select Committee on Post-War Military Policy in 1944. Its original justification had been the lack of sufficient coordination between the Army and Navy during the war, especially just before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

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But interservice coordination is not Nunn's first goal; he nowhere claims the lack of it as a problem. The Nunn-Clinton proposal identifies the benefit of moving beyond the 1948 agreements in terms of potential savings. Looking at air power Nunn says, "We spend tens of billions of dollars every year operating tactical aircraft squadrons in each of the four services." Noting that the Navy wants to spend from $55 billion to $75 billion on a new version of the F–18 while the Air Force plans to replace its F–16 fleet, Nunn asks whether the services could save money by cooperating together in the development of a common multirole fighter.

These questions are rooted in the desire to save costs, not in *changed circumstances.* Nunn in the end offers merely another justification for cutting defense that may or may not suit the disorderly world and American interests. It does not start out by taking deliberate aim at these vexing problems. But whatever the merits of his proposal, it does expand the definitions of jointness.

These definitions share a common, suspicious view of the services and are differentiated by their political content. Goldwater-Nichols is the least political. Knowing the military's responsiveness to hierarchy and promotion, it seeks harmony through organizational changes that tinker with power and incentives. The legislation has other effects, but it had no other end.

General Powell's emphasis on operational teamwork stands unmovably on the firm ground of experience. It is harder to say what the positive effect of his call to reproduce this cooperation at the staff level means except in broad terms of encouraging respect for the views of officers from different services. But Powell's more distant—and political—goal is to dampen the rivalry among the services that could still be an instrument of wanton dismemberment in the hands of legislators bent on extracting further *peace dividends* from the military.

Most political are Nunn's questions on duplication and redundancy. Wrapped in reflections on the changed circumstances of our time and casting back to the political tussles of the late 1940s, the queries by the Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee are linked by the political goal of reducing defense costs, which accounts for campaigner Clinton's support.

The Passion for Purple

There is a serious problem with this growing chorus of calls for jointness. The sense of purpose and morale, and thus ultimately the effectiveness of the services, is threatened by a calculus of their diminishing identities. The undesirability of absolute jointness—complete absorption of all the services into a single organization—should be plain since there is no serious proposal to go that far. Somewhere is a view of the services as too big and complicated to be led

easily from the center, and of their skills as too diverse to be mixed without weakening the final compound.

Unfortunately, albeit unintentionally, this is where we are headed. Ideas have been legislated, those representing the current thinking of the leaders of the Department of Defense, and those still in the planning stages, are not like a series of proposals on national health from which one must be chosen. Instead, these and other proposals will have a cumulative effect.

DOD photo by R.D. Ward

General Powell appearing before the House Armed Services Committee.

The increased time that officers spend in staff positions as a result of Goldwater-Nichols as well as the rising quality of officers who are assigned to joint billets has improved the strength of personnel on combined staffs. Of this there is no doubt. But at what price? When the system as retooled by Goldwater-Nichols produces its first Chairman and set of Joint Chiefs, will they know as much about the capabilities of their services as those who preceded them? Will the opinions they give under the most demanding circumstances to a President who has no military experience be as operationally informed as the advice of a general officer such as Norman Schwarzkopf who, until he became a CINC, had only served one tour on a joint staff? [5]

And what dislocations are being caused by the legislatively induced requirement for the Armed Forces to push a large pool of qualified officers through the relatively narrow channel of joint duty billets? Personnel detailers already talk in private both about the demoralization junior officers sense at not earning joint qualifications soon enough, and the growing pressure to exclude from joint assignments any officer who is not rated first or second among several peers in yearly evaluations. Although men like George Marshall distinguished themselves early in their careers, the genius of such other great officers as Ulysses S. Grant revealed itself later. Is the system's rational response to Goldwater-Nichols denying the Nation the talents of late bloomers? Or will the military ultimately find a way to move officers through joint duty assignments by unintentionally hamstringing the Joint Staff and the CINCs with a host of joint billets?

Neither alternative beckons. For the moment, however, one direction is clear. The current Chairman, General Powell, has used the powers of his office which were enlarged by Goldwater-Nichols, as well as his own exceptional political talents, to cultivate a spirit of cooperation among the services. Balanced reductions in forces reinforced by an inclusive approach to service assets in combat and cushioned by such educational efforts as this journal have been the order of the day.

But again, the call to jointness has some discordant notes. The need for teamwork when combined operations are required is incontestable. However, do joint assignments and education, the powerful message of documents such as Joint Pub 1, or even the Goldwater-Nichols Act itself promote such teamwork where it matters: in combat? Perhaps. But the evidence is scanty.

Joint Pub 1 paints General Schwarzkopf's victory over Iraq as a jewel in the joint crown. It quotes repeatedly and at length from all his component commanders on the virtues of harmony. But Schwarzkopf, by his own account, is a straightforward, old-fashioned Army man with little tolerance for staff life, and no warm feelings for joint duty. He speaks of his decision to accept an assignment in the Army Secretariat as ticket punching.[6] And, the "happiest day" of Schwarzkopf's tour on the staff of U.S. Pacific Command occurred when he was ordered to Germany as assistant division commander of the 8th Mechanized Infantry.[7] The Central Command commander did not trust the Joint Staff much either. Referring to slides from a briefing on Operation Desert Storm which President Bush received in Washington, Schwarzkopf told his chief of

staff, "I want them presented by you personally, not some officer from the Joint Staff." [8]

Nowhere in his popular autobiography does Schwarzkopf mention Goldwater-Nichols or the 1986 law's supposed multiplication of the CINC's power which others have touted as key to the success of U.S. arms in the Gulf War. Although he had anxious moments when Washington's requests for information made him fear that the policymakers did not wholly grasp the true picture, Schwarzkopf attributes his success in part to the freedom he was given to operate according to his best judgment and Powell's ability to run political interference.

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Schwarzkopf's appreciation of jointness lacks the *diversity of approaches* and *harmony of effort* tone that characterizes Joint Pub 1, but the vacuum is filled by practical and effective action. When his order to move VII Corps into position in control of Safwan airfield was not obeyed, the CINC tells his Army component commander that unless the original orders are executed, he will give the job to the Marines. This threat helps speed action.

It fits neatly into the operational appreciation of jointness that Schwarzkopf gained in 1983 as Army advisor to Vice Admiral Joe Metcalf who led the invasion of Grenada. As Schwarzkopf tells it, when Metcalf required expertise on ground operations—as he did in planning the opposed movement of Army and Marine units across the island to free American medical students—Metcalf asked Schwarzkopf to write the orders.

However, when it subsequently became clear that a helicopter assault to release the students at Grand Anse would be quicker and less costly, Metcalf gave the order. Schwarzkopf explained the plan to the Marine colonel whose helicopters were to carry Army troops in the hostage rescue. When the colonel balked, Schwarzkopf noted that the order came from Metcalf and threatened a court martial. The matter was quickly resolved and the operation proceeded.

Joint tours, revised educational curricula, exhortations to cooperate, and legislation did not help—or hurt—General Schwarzkopf in the execution of his joint duties. When he was called on for advice, he gave his best which was very good indeed because it was based on many years of work perfecting his skill. And when he required assistance and cooperation of officers from other services, he knew how to get it.

The balance in the system which produced Schwarzkopf and such other successful unified commanders as General Max Thurman, who led the U.S. Southern Command during the invasion of Panama in 1989, was as difficult to achieve as it is easy to upset. In this equilibrium, the need for competitive ideas at the center where decisions are made about the size, shape, purpose, and mixture of forces serves as equipoise to the demand for harmonious action in battle.

Such efforts as the increasing emphasis on jointness tip the scales in the direction of concerted operational effort. However, by effectively putting a damper on conflicting ideas, they also suppress debate over such fundamental issues as the composition and character of future forces. Backed by a forceful Chairman, Joint Pub 1's insistence on *common perspectives, teamwork,* and *cooperation* delivers a strong warning against arguments, for example, that support asymmetrical reductions in U.S. forces in response to world events. Admonitions that "there is no place for rivalry" on the joint team, that the military should "exploit the diversity of approaches that a joint force provides," help establish a standard of political correctness in the Armed Forces that chokes off consideration of ideas which, while troublesome to the interests of an individual service or a particular weapons system, might be important to the Nation.

The problem is not jointness but rather what is meant by jointness. Unified effort in the field has real meaning, and there is no serious argument against this. But outside the realms of the unified commanders, the

notion becomes unclear or encourages intellectual torpor.

The medical profession's contemporary experience offers clear parallels and a constructive direction. Like officers, physicians must devote a growing portion of their time to mastering the technical demands of their art. Technological advancements in diagnostic and surgical instruments as well as the doubling of medical knowledge roughly every four years is forcing doctors to concentrate on smaller and smaller parts of the human anatomy. The body, however, is a whole, and a pathology of the optic nerve, for example, might be apparent to neurosurgeons where ophthalmologists would overlook it. The cure is to balance specific with general knowledge. In military terms, the solution to the want of a common perspective is not to exhort officers and enlisted personnel to get one, but to provide one that is based on ideas rooted in experience.

In other words, one must study history to understand the causes of military success and failure. By noting joint and combined operations throughout the text, Joint Pub 1 does acknowledge this need. But its historical lessons all teach jointness. And dependence on ratios of students from different services to determine whether a service college course qualifies as joint in the wake of Goldwater-Nichols is an obvious example of the triumph of process over substance. Military history is richer and more complicated. It shows that organizations as well as great captains can make the difference between victory and disaster. It teaches the value of thinking through tactical and strategic problems beforehand. It demonstrates the advantage of being able to swiftly change ideas, plans, and operations in the face of the unanticipated.

Jointness is not an end in itself. Nor can anyone prove that it is. Jointness is a minimal requirement for most of the imaginable situations in which this Nation would use force in the future. Apart from combat, it is a rhetorical whip that maintains a politically useful discipline among the services in a time of falling defense budgets. But the hierarchy's forceful message not to squabble also helps muffle consideration of such ideas as the unequal division of budget cuts based on national requirements or a national security strategy that may not rely on balanced forces. Unfortunately, such questions are precisely the ones to be examined. Insofar as the pressure for jointness keeps these issues at bay, the Nation is deprived of a debate it should conduct.

In *Federalist 10* James Madison, urging adoption of the Constitution, reflects on the proposed Union's ability to control the dangerous effects of political faction. "The causes of faction cannot be removed . . . relief is only to be sought in controlling the effects." Heading off controversy in the Armed Forces over basic questions on the future could eventually remove the causes of disagreements among the services by helping to strip them of their pugnacity. This would not serve America well either. It would be better to seek jointness off the battlefield in the renewed effort to understand the valuable lessons of warfare through the experiences of those who have succeeded and failed at it. JFQ

NOTES

[1] The Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Warfare of the U.S. Armed Forces*, Joint Pub 1 (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1991), p. 2.

[2] Ibid., p. 4.

[3] Ibid., p. 15.

[4] Ibid., p. 32.

[5] Schwarzkopf quotes the reaction of his commanding officer, Major General Richard Cavazos, to the news Schwarzkopf had been ordered to the Pacific Command when he was a one-star general: "Whoever made that decision is a dumb bastard." H. Norman Schwarzkopf in *It Doesn't Take a Hero* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992), p. 214.

[6] Ibid., p. 191.

[7] Ibid., p. 221.

[8] Ibid., p. 360.